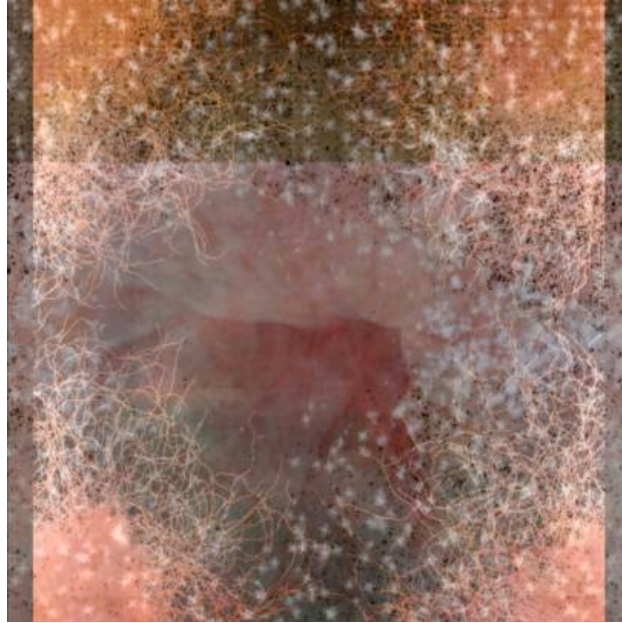


# *A-life Undeading of Painting via the Algorithmic*

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*rear windOw curiOsités* (2012) 2x2m computer-robotic assisted painting

***Eroticism which is a fusion, which shifts interest away from and beyond the person and his limits, is nevertheless expressed by an object. We are faced with the paradox of an object which implies the abolition of the limits of all objects, of an erotic object.***

-Georges Bataille<sup>1</sup>

The algorithmic has brought back from the dead the practice of painting. It has made it alive. Indeed, it has made it re-blossom in the enthusiastic and vivacious sense of the word *alive*.

Algorithmic skill has made painting alive for me in a specific sense, as I began mixing my digital painting practice with C++ programming techniques of artificial life (a-life). Therefore, the

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<sup>1</sup> Bataille, Georges. *Erotism, Death and Sensuality*, p. 130, Trans. Mary Dalwood, San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986 ©1962

algorithmic as applied to painting excites me and this excitement allows me to work with zeal. A curious alliance: the cold impersonality of algorithmic technology with the heat of passion.

But yes, I am still excited to be working with algorithmic painting (which I have been doing since 1986) because hidden in connected computer space of the algorithm there is something so large, so astounding, and so pregnant with the darkness of infinite space that it excites and frightens me, and thus returns me to the experimental and a state of stimulating desire.

As a result, I am energized by the practice of algorithmic painting because it is, in my opinion, where many culturally significant things can happen in art today. This is so because digital-algorithmic painting is a precise reaction to critical things as they are now in the speedy hyperactive information age while maintaining the position of reflective criticality found in the long tradition of silent and immobile painted surfaces.

In 1987 Deleuze and Guattari<sup>2</sup> decoded for me the tradition of painting and proposed an algorithmic tack. A tack which leads from (and back to) Artaud's Body-without-Organs<sup>3</sup>, to swarms and rhizomes, to processes of de-territorialization and reterritorialization through the virtual, and to desiring cyborg machines and other visual lines of flight. This algorithmic tack enhanced my general conviction that art is first-rate when it brings compound conceptual abstractions onto the perceptual stage. Where the result is a sensual embodiment of real-yet-abstract forces. Deleuze and Guattari made it clear that painting must reflect the digital if it is to be other than a stinking cadaver. Painting must involve the algorithmic to be, as Susan Sontag wrote in *Against Interpretation*, a new kind of instrument, an instrument for modifying consciousness and organizing new modes of sensibility, because our consciousness (and sensibility) is largely now molded by the virtual. But of course that raises the question: which real-yet-abstract forces?

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<sup>2</sup> Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press

<sup>3</sup> In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari describe a shift towards boundlessness as one's becoming a body without organs (BwO) in terms of our self-shifting representational planes emerging out of our field of compositional consistency. The BwO (according to them) is an insubstantial state of connected being beyond representation which concerns pure becomings and nomadic essences. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 510) Deleuze and Guattari go on to say that the BwO "causes intensities to pass; it produces and distributes them in a spatium that is itself intensive, lacking extension. It is not space nor is it in space; it is matter that occupies space to a given degree - to the degree corresponding to the intensities produced". (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 153) According to Brian Massumi, the translator of *A Thousand Plateaus*, the BwO is "an endless weaving together of singular states, each of which is an integration of one or more impulses." These impulses form the body's various "erogenous zone(s)" of condensed "vibratory regions;" zones of intensity in suspended animation. Hence the BwO is "the body outside any determinate state, poised for any action in its repertory; this is the body in terms of its potential, or virtuality." (Massumi, 1992, p. 70) : Massumi, B. 1992. *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*. Cambridge, Ma.: MIT Press

For me, the power of the abstracting force of ideology in distributed information continues to be of critical interest and continues to supply my art with its motivational urgency. In that we live in the information age, the essential abstract political feature now is electronic reiteration and its role in creating psychological viruses (memes) within our culture. In that sense, my post-conceptual digital painting is a virtual Dada<sup>4</sup> in its subjectivist approach towards ideology (including the rules and ideology behind the practice of traditional painting) within the field of reproductive technology. My painting practice and algorithmic craft certainly is in one way Post-Postmodern (what I call *viractual* – a mixture of the ephemeral virtual and the actual physical) because it paradoxically defends Modernism, as well as celebrates the radical plurality of a form of knowing that is undeniably characteristic of contemporary electronics. This adherence to the electronic/digital now rejects the relativism that postmodernists insist upon and lends the work a formal consistency (algorithmic) that is indicative of modernism. Specifically, this intentional stance defends modernism's tradition of valuing the opticality of flatness that was established in America just after World War II.

What is valued in this tradition is the practice of so-called 'pure' visuality over material texture when it comes to painting. This value is manifest through the strict flatness achieved in my computer-robotic assisted paintings' paint application, where an air-gun/air-nozzle pigment delivery system, driven by an algorithmic computer program, sprays-stains the canvas support. There is no 3D texture in these paintings, other than the minuscule one provided by the canvas weave. There is no "crouste," (crust) as the French say. Thus they create a single smooth case in point based on the essential nature of fluid algorithmic virtuality. Making the concept of the virtual visually perceivable, in the actual terms of natural light and real time, is achieved through a process of creating a visual integration process that I have termed the *viractual* which is a creative state neither pure nor impure, but algorithmic. Through this flatness, one encounters a perceptual area of smooth virtual-algorithmic though often extensively layered as unfathomable.

This algorithmic state of formal completion turns our attention towards the conceptual subject matter of the paintings. In aiming to succeed within the essential characteristics of viractuality, I

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<sup>4</sup> My ex-centric practice of sending digital files on-line to a hired computer-robotic machine for painting on canvas follows the dada proposition found in Richard Huelsenbeck's 1920 text (1993 "The Dada Almanac" p. 95) that states an artist could order paintings over the phone and have them fabricated by a third party. Of course this idea was famously realized in 1922 by László Moholy-Nagy when he ordered his Telephone Pictures by phone from a sign factory. (Moholy-Nagy L. 1947. "The New Vision and Abstract of an Artist", p. 79) Tony Smith, the American sculptor, is also very relevant to this telematic tradition with his steel 6x6x6' black cube minimal masterpiece "Die" (1962), a composition he ordered over the phone by calling in the specifications to his fabricator.

have come to work for years on the subject of the hermaphrodite. Specifically, a hermaphroditic pre-bifurcation moment in human development called *oogenesics*. Oogenesics is a moment in the development of the fertilized egg where both female and male potentiality exists simultaneously. This moment of potentiality exemplifies the viractual concept brilliantly - indeed virtuality, viractuality and algorithmic code have myth status in terms of my oogenesic hermaphroditism.

The hermaphrodite is an important viractual image in that it suggests the truth in life that a thing can be both one thing and its opposite: that two opposites can exist simultaneously and not cancel each other out.

Such peacefully sustained conflict can be the agent of transformation and the creator of something new. Peacefully sustained conflict engages the audience in a play of contradiction and excess that encourages active critical thought and moves us away from positions of passive accepted emotion. Such algorithmic oogenesic art may offer further reflections on the algorithmic flux by further viral a-life infections. If an algorithmic oogenesic infection is chosen and saved and launched into the 'actual' art world by being painted, it performs a peculiar viractual act in its own right.

Through this algorithmic painting method, I avoid seeking the pursuit of endless electronic stimulation and rather seek out satiation. Such satiation supplies a chain of pleasures in which the delights of the actual human body are not subordinated to the virtual or the tactile, but rather shape the virtual towards the living (yet classical) pleasures of painting within its new algorithmic-conceptual context.

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